

February 28, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of delaying the implementation of the requirements regarding reading models or programs.

Each and every child deserves a quality education with skilled teachers and the resources to help meet his or her needs. Reading achievement has historically been a concern at all levels of our society. In my daily work with elementary students, I know that there is not one program or approach that will magically reach our goal of 100% of students achieving reading mastery! It takes time, continued support, high expectations, and a variety of resources to make sure all students thrive. To mandate school districts choose one of the five “approved” reading programs is to create a larger disparity, unrealistic expectations, and a recipe for failure.

When I think about instruction and student learning, I often think about medicine. When I go to see my doctor, the last thing I would want him or her to do would be to look at a prescribed program, turn to the page for *63 year old female*, and prescribe what is on that page. We know that this approach would never lead to a high degree of good health for patients. No one would think this was good medical practice! Instead, I expect my doctors to look at me as an individual, study my strengths and needs, study protocols and research, and prescribe accordingly. This is what I expect from teachers as well.

In addition to mandating particular programs and approaches, this state mandate is unfunded. How can the state expect local districts to bear the burden of purchasing costly programs and training teachers to use them? In small districts, it would take close to \$1 million to implement. School districts throughout Connecticut are not equitably or equally funded, and this mandate requires districts with limited funding and resources to purchase “approved” programs.

This state mandate is unrealistic and potentially harmful. There is not one program or approach that meets the needs of all students. As a K-5 Literacy Coach, I understand what it takes to help students grow in their reading skills, interest, and achievement. It requires the flexibility of multiple resources, training, literacy coaching, literacy interventionists, and monitoring to help each and every student grow as a reader. It is not a single strategy or program. Furthermore,

the mandate has the potential to undo the good work that many districts have been pursuing and thereby undoing the progress that many students have been making in the area of reading.

The state mandate is a recipe for continued failure. This mandate and the approved reading programs are limited. Some do not even have the phonics component that is required for approval. There is a lack of culturally responsive representation because most of the characters are animals. It is not comprehensive because reading is more than just phonics. Reading includes deep comprehension along with joy, engagement, and the ability to think critically. These are the types of readers and thinkers we need if we are to prepare our students for an ever-changing global world where they can be socially responsible citizens.

I would like to propose a suspension of this mandate. During this suspension, there should be a collaborative opportunity for educators and leaders from every district to work directly with the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success and the Reading Leadership Implementation Council in order to provide accurate accounts, information, and lived experiences of the children they work with every day. Our goal is to support all students on their journey to become readers, thinkers, and powerful citizens in our global world.

Thank you for your consideration,

Erika Griffin

Erika Griffin
K-5 Literacy Coach